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24 DEC 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Proposed Response to Query Concerning
U-2 Overflight Policy.

1. This memorandum contains a recommendation for your consideration. Such recommendation is contained in paragraph 5.

2. There is always a possibility that in his press conference the President will be queried concerning his policy with regard to U-2 overflights of the Soviet Union. The probability of this question being raised would be heightened by any incident which would again focus attention on the U-2, but even in the absence of such an incident it is considered highly desirable that the President be provided in advance with a response worded in such manner as to ensure the least inhibition to future intelligence collection activities deemed essential to national security.

3. Because of its pertinence there is attached the verbatim exchange between President Kennedy and newsmen at his press conference on 25 January 1961. It should be noted that, contrary to popular assumption, President Kennedy did not make any pledge or give any assurance, at least publicly, that there would be no further overflights. He limited his response to a statement that he had ordered that the flights not be resumed. An order, obviously, is valid only until countermanded.

4. In light of the foregoing, it is proposed that if the President is queried on this matter he respond with the following statement (this may also help to set the record straight):

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"As you are all aware, President Kennedy at his news conference on 25 January 1961, stated that he had ordered that such flights not be resumed. That order has never been countermanded and so far as I am concerned is still in effect."

If the questioner should pursue the matter by asking under what conditions might the order be countermanded and such flights resumed, it is proposed that the President answer as follows:

"I think it would be highly inappropriate for me to speculate on any such purely hypothetical future situation."

5. Recommendation:

That the President be briefed on the possibility that the U-2 overflight might policy issue may be raised at some future press conference and that he be prepared to respond with the statements proposed in paragraph 4 above.

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Original signed by

for

ALBERT D. WHEELON
Deputy Director
(Science and Technology)

Attachment - 1

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Verbatim Transcript ☐ 3861-63/A)

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Signature Recommended:

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